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Reflections on Exile and Academic Precarity: Discussing *At the Margins of Academia*

Aslı Vatansever and Aysuda Kölemen

Vatansever's recently published book *At the Margins of Academia: Exile, Precariousness, and Subjectivity* (2020) examines the intersection of two states in present-day academia: precarity and exile. After discussing academic precarity at length in the first section of her book, Vatansever's focus shifts to the traumatic impact and transformative power of exile in the second half. She interviews Academics for Peace, like herself, who were dismissed from their positions, banned from working in Turkish academia, and lost their passports after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. Most significantly, the book does not depict precarity as an exceptional state that only threatens less productive or politically undesired groups in academia. On the contrary, Vatansever insists that precarity has become innate to and necessary for the survival of the contemporary academic structure. In other words, academia as it is can only be sustained through the precarity of the majority of its members. *At the Margins of Academia* makes the case that exile is no longer the sole cause of precarity but rather a compounding factor, albeit a powerful one, in this milieu.

1 *There is a lot to unpack in your book. I was very much intrigued by your discussion of the different functions that academic precarity serves. You argue that past and present precarity are both qualitatively and quantitatively different: exclusion from academic ranks and stable positions was a rarely employed tool to discipline unruly academics in the liberal past, whereas such exclusion is integral to the functioning of the academic system in the neoliberal environment of the last decades. Can you expand on this difference? What are its causes and consequences?*

2 There is indeed much to discuss and elaborate on, because in 'exile' multiple political and socio-economic forms of vulnerability converge. 'Exclusion' is certainly a major

component of exile, but it's not limited to politico-territorial banishment. As I explained in the book, exile entails various forms of exclusion which become visible only over time and put the exiled individual possibly on a par with various precarious lives that hitherto seemed worlds apart.

3 But let us start with your question on the past and present forms of precariousness. First of all, we shouldn't think of these in chronological terms, as they usually coexist. And we certainly cannot limit the scope of precarization to the academic sector. As you've probably noticed, I have developed the argument on the logic of precarization in discussion with various approaches to precarity and subjectivity. With regard to the transformation of precariousness from a punitive tool to a systemic logic, I am deeply indebted to Isabell Lorey's works on insecurity. In her *State of Insecurity* (2015) Lorey argues that precarization is not a form of punishment reserved for the deviant anymore. She detects in precarization a deliberate form of governance that affects all subjects, albeit to different degrees depending on their proximity to the source of economic and political power. And the mechanism of precarization proceeds along all lines thinkable: through unstable employment, political instability, and destabilization of the conduct of life. As such, precariousness represents more than a functional tool – it constitutes the norm.

4 The causes of this sort of mutation in the systemic rationality are of course very much related to the structural transformation that we have been witnessing for roughly four decades now – known as the neoliberal turn. In a system where the stakes get higher and higher yet the venues to circumvent the tendency of the profit rates to fall become more and more scarce, you just have to decrease the number of the shareholders of gains and increase the number of those who share in the risk and instability. Many studies have pointed to the fact that implementing this sort of economic reality requires a brutalization of the political climate as well (Harvey 2007; Sassen 2014; Davies 2016; Streeck 2017). In fact, the rise of conservative populisms has been widely analyzed in relation to that. And we shall not forget that the question of this "shareholders of gains vs. shareholders of loss"-dichotomy also has a global angle: the shareholders of the global increase in political brutality are mostly the peripheral and semi-peripheral regions of the world-system. These are the same regions that have the smaller share in "gains", i.e. a smaller piece of the global accumulation of capital. And this is not a coincidence.

5 Coming back to how this whole configuration affects the academic sector: In the book and elsewhere I have made a somewhat simplifying yet useful categorization: I described the combination of economic precarization and political oppression that the academic labor force currently faces as a "double pressure mechanism". I argue that they are two sides of the same coin, although their proportions vary depending on the coordinates of a given region within the world-economy: In the core countries, the former usually prevails, whereas in the periphery we encounter more overt forms of the latter.

6 Whenever I say this, some people in the audience get restless and protest: "Are you saying that facing unemployment in Europe is equally bad as facing jail in Turkey? How dare you?" and so on – some blame me for downplaying the political threat in Turkey, some blame me for not appreciating enough the academic freedoms in Europe. In my opinion, this is an ultimately one-dimensional way of looking at things that still kind of reflects that old, Eurocentric reflex of defending the "European exceptionality". First of

all: I refuse to put these two – job security vs. academic freedom – on a scale and be happy with a Sophie's choice. Second: The absence of violent forms of political oppression does not automatically imply limitless academic freedom. We must definitely ask, for example, to what extent freedom of research can exist where researchers have no job security, or where market incentives have come to dictate the research agendas. And last but not least: In terms of analytical value, we should all vehemently refuse this type of mechanical categorization as if these two factors – economic precarity and political oppression – could exist separately. What I have been trying to underline all along is the exact opposite: They are part of the same systemic logic; the fact that they occur in different forms and to different degrees in different places should not deceive us into believing that we can solve one without dealing with the other. But as Fredric Jameson once said, treating interrelated structural phenomena as separate, singular occurrences is unfortunately also an inherent tendency of the intellectual culture of late capitalism (Jameson 2015). So before we even get to dealing with the concrete structural problems, we find ourselves battling with the epistemological paradigm that prevents us from identifying those problems correctly and conjointly in the first place.

7 *Let us touch on your application of the processes of de-subjectivation and re-subjectivation to the academic context, which I find to be the most significant contribution of your book to the debate on academic precarity. To me, there is almost an incomprehensible gap between our self-perception as academics and how we have thoroughly and universally failed to grasp and react to the ever rising precarity in our profession until very recently. We pride ourselves on studying, understanding, and explaining social phenomena. Yet the majority of academics did not realize that most of us were being pushed to reserve labor status – a Marxian concept that is central to your analysis of academic precarity – until it pervaded academia everywhere. Even as many academics began to personally observe and experience the toll of increasing precarity, they continued to perceive this as an individual problem and refused to admit that the system was designed to function only through the exploitation of the reserve army. Finally, even those academics who were aware of the situation failed to unite and take action. You discuss how we are complicit in our own exploitation, to the degree that we glamorize our participation in it, a situation that you liken to that of the creative professions. What we are talking about here are complicated structural and psychological impediments to organizing resistance. What kinds of mechanisms and discourses create this culture of complicity? Why do we willingly refrain from turning our investigative gaze onto ourselves? What do we have to lose besides our chains? What is our opium if you will?*

8 This is an issue that has been preoccupying me for a long time. It is a widely known fact that the significantly high degree of occupational identification and illusions of autonomy in the so-called creative/intellectual sectors typically lead to voluntary self-exploitation and ascetic workaholism. Academic work is a prime example and actually the forerunner in this regard: Academics have been priding themselves on low wages and voluntary overwork long before the neoliberal turn made "passion" and "intrinsic motivation" into essential criteria of being a good worker. "We are not doing this for money" has always been the motto in the academic sector. So much so that salary secrecy and silence over the material conditions of living have been an integral part of the academic work culture. I remember for example how scared I was to ask about my salary when I was about to start working as an assistant professor at a private university in Turkey ten years ago. And how the head of the department – an old, male emeritus professor – literally frowned and refused to give me any information on that.

He literally said “Why do you want to know how much you will get? Does your mama not give you any pocket money anymore?” This may sound exceptional, since it is the kind of thing that only an old, male professor can dare to say to a young female academic. But it is actually one of the many examples of how early-career researchers are being intimidated and prevented from defending their rights as workers on a daily basis. And this toxic work culture of salary-secrecy and worker-shaming is being sustained by the academics themselves.

9 As a matter of fact, when I was doing research on the working conditions at private universities in Turkey together with my colleague Meral Gezici-Yalçın five years ago, we had to listen to so many horror-stories: stories about how people signed empty contracts without knowing their salary, about how they refrained from asking for a raise for years on end, or how they didn’t even dare to protest when they weren’t paid at all for months. And yet, the same people who told us these stories in contempt were still reluctant to call themselves “workers”, because they believed that what they did was beyond the banality of wage-labor – they were dedicated to the holy pursuit of knowledge! Their alleged passion and dedication made them put up with exploitation, mobbing, and sometimes even outright degradation and lots and lots of job insecurity. As someone who’s been through hell and back and to hell again in academia within a decade, most of that so-called passion and love for research and teaching seem to me to be barely more than a coping mechanism. Especially in the case of precarious researchers, who remain infantilized as “early-career” well up until their mid- or late-40s: It is a coping mechanism, or an alibi, to justify and accept an extremely abusive work culture and exploitative employment relations. In the last instance, the over-emphasis on intrinsic motivation in academia originates from an imagined yet tenacious belief in the supremacy of intellectual desires over the material conditions of life. And as such, it is not only inherently reactionary and elitist, but also extremely hypocritical. Yes, hypocritical, because we all know for a fact what mostly dictates the research agendas today – and it is 100% not an unquenched desire for the quest for truth.

10 There is certainly some kind of a sacrifice at play here, but it is not being done in the name of knowledge production. People are sacrificing their mental and physical health, their personal relationships, their biologically reproductive years, and sometimes even their ethical values and dignity; but in most cases they do so only to stay in the game and survive. The majority of the academic workforce works under forcefully flexibilized working conditions with extremely short-term contracts and without any future prospects. For this new faculty majority, an academic career means barely anything more than ‘survival without surplus’. Under these circumstances, it is safe to say that we are reaching the social and ethical zero-point in this sector. And the way to this zero point is paved with good intentions – and with sermons about passion and dedication.

11 This toxic “self-sacrificial ethos”(Gill 2009) in academia, as Rosalind Gill calls it, was also institutionalized through the state-run formation of the modern research university and consolidated through academic rites and ceremonies. The typical status of the *tenured* professor at a state university – formerly the quintessential type of academic worker – is that of a civil servant. As such, the position connotes a certain selflessness pertaining to public service. But more importantly, it entails a direct link with the state apparatus – and, consequently, an actual legal ban on collective action in

most countries. For example, this is the case in Germany. In the meantime, the ritualistic symbols of distinction in academia, ranging from feudal artefacts like caps and gowns to formal procedures like graduation ceremonies and doctoral disputations, contribute greatly to the elevated image of the academic worker vis-à-vis the other segments of the working population. While these ceremonial elements serve to enhance occupational identification among academics, they also intensify their dis-identification with regular wage-labor.

12 However, the structural decline of job security renders the civil servant status inaccessible and the ritualistic symbolism meaningless for a growing portion of the academic labor force. The disconnect between the 'moral codex' of academic profession and the concrete norms dominating the actual labor process in practice is manifested most visibly in the discrepancy between the tenure-oriented career culture and the actual percentage of tenured positions in today's academic industry. The tenure model is in obvious decline and has become an exception in many contexts, whereas it continues to prevail as the archetypical form of academic work. If you think about it, in a world where it is known for a fact that there are not enough vacant professorships to absorb the qualified PhD holders, it is outrageous that professorship is still seen as the ultimate criterion for academic merit at every level, from institutional governance to occupational prestige and future orientation. The belief that one might get tenure one day, if one works hard and does not make waves, is one of the main reasons why the majority of the precarious academics are still reluctant to take action. They just don't want to mess up their chances of getting a permanent position. It is simply pathetic how so many of them still believe they can make it, although they know very well the labor market situation – it's like looking at a group of supposedly above-average intelligent and educated people not being able to do the simplest math! Or worse: it's like watching a group of people propagate equality and justice in public but do the exact opposite in their own lives and turn into ruthless, Machiavellian sociopaths to get a job.

13 Nevertheless, at this point, I have to say that instead of harping on about alibis to explain why resistance is impossible, we should see that something is moving despite everything: The decline of job security and the astonishing rise of precarity in academia within the last two decades have led to a questioning of the academic work culture and its persistent myths for the first time. And again, for the first time in the entire history of the sector, we have started to witness collective action and labor activism in academia, as the recent cases in the UK, the USA, France, Denmark, Germany, and Italy show. So far, occupational prestige, job security, and the alleged pleasure derived from autonomous intellectual work have been the only advantages of an academic career. These advantages used to compensate for everything else. Now that along with job security prestige and autonomy fade away as well, the shine wears off and the brutality of the academic work culture and the deep-rooted hierarchy in academic structures come to the surface. More and more people in academia start to realize that they, too, are wage-laborers after all. You might say it's not enough, considering the magnitude of the problem ahead, but the formation of anti-precarity initiatives in academia offers hope for optimism.

14 *Your current research focuses on German academia, where we observe the unholy fusion of the rigidity of a feudally hierarchical structure and the inhumane "flexibility" of the late capitalist economy. Why do you think the German university system evolved to combine the worst of both*

worlds? Do you think the much touted but conveniently ambiguous principle of academic freedom in the German constitutional law (Grundgesetz) *can be realized in this environment? Is it not time to redefine the parameters of academic freedom so as to include economic precarity and hierarchical structures as threats alongside political persecution? Your interviews with politically persecuted scholars who migrated to Germany only to experience extreme precarity reveal that while the sources may be entirely different, the impact of economic and political uncertainty on academic work can be chillingly similar. Can you talk about how these interviews illustrate the similarities and differences? Do German academics you are interviewing for your current project on anti-precarity initiatives in Germany frame their loss of economic stability and research autonomy in terms of academic freedom? What are the main differences between the perspectives of academics from Germany and Turkey?*

15 As I said before, I am vehemently against handling the issue of job security and academic freedom separately. The fact that academics in Germany do not face prison for an intellectual gesture as simple and basic as demanding peace does not mean that Germany is a haven for the academic labor force and everything is perfect. We are looking at an academic system marked by striking job insecurity and feudal hierarchies, to begin with.

16 The commodification of knowledge and the privatization of higher education in the last few decades have radically transformed the academic landscape everywhere, including Germany. Universities in Germany have also been forced to eliminate non-profitable research and degree programs to become "market-smart" – and not surprisingly, this argument has often been used to eliminate critical strands like Marxist Theory or Gender Studies. Meanwhile, the cost-cutting mentality came to shape the academic employment relations. We can see it in the steady elimination of tenure and its replacement with contingent employment practices. The drastic cutback of public funds in higher education rendered researchers and institutions overly dependent on third-party funding. The overdependence on external funding increased the influence of the market massively, as can be seen in how the business-oriented rhetoric of "excellence" infiltrated the entire academic world. Under these circumstances, as you pointed out as well, we need to ask what is left of academic freedom even in countries like Germany that were hitherto seen as the bastion of it.

17 As to the exiled/displaced academics in Germany and how we should locate them analytically within the German academia: Germany is a particularly interesting case in point. It is the favorite destination within the EU for the same reason that should actually make it the least preferable: the plethora of third-party funding opportunities. At a first glance, the large quantity of third-party funding options looks like a blessing, but it's actually a curse. Let me explain what I mean by that:

18 In the German academic system, the only form of job security is the full professorship and everything below that is fixed-termed. Currently, the full professors make up only 7% of the entire academic workforce in the country, which means that 93% consists of precarious researchers working on fixed-term contracts and/or in third-party funded projects. In the last 2 decades since 2000, the percentage of the so-called early-career academics (meaning: PhD students and post-docs) has increased by 76%. During the same time period, the number of professors has only grown by 21%.[1]

19 This means that the German academic labor market has produced and continues to produce an ever-growing academic surplus labor force. A great portion of this surplus workforce is used as outsourced labor for routine and less-awarding functions such as

undergrad teaching, mentoring, and project assistance. The staff renewal rate in that section is horrendous – there are literally postdoc positions for 2-3 months, people get thrilled when there is a job opening for 2-3 years in an *Excellence Cluster* project. Interestingly, nobody is bothered by the rapid turnover in non-tenured faculty since they are seen as a disposable workforce anyway. In the meantime, a small labor aristocracy is granted job security and encouraged to focus on profitable research activities funded by "big money". And these are the tenured professors who enjoy lifetime job security as state officials and possess additional budgets and assistant cadres of their own. This "systematic connection between precarity and privilege" is now what characterizes the German academic landscape. And it has immense negative outcomes in terms of the quality of higher education, the work-life-balance and mental and physical health of early- and mid-career researchers, in terms of academic ethics and collegial solidarity, and the future of knowledge production.

20 But fortunately, there emerged venues of resistance at the same time within the last decade – first in the form of local initiatives and then evolving into a national network of precarious researchers. I have been working on and in the *Network for Decent Work in Academia* (*Netzwerk für Gute Arbeit in der Wissenschaft, NGAWiss*) in Germany for almost a year now. As you said, I also conducted interviews with a number of active members. For the most part, their academic profile reflects the reality of the academic precariat in Germany. Most of the actors are early- or mid-career researchers off the tenure track. They have been jumping from one fixed-term lectureship or assistantship to another, almost always working under the control and at the mercy of full professors. Their senior colleagues respond to their struggle for better working conditions either with silent shoulder-tapping at best, or with contempt and ridicule at worst. And the most politically active and publicly vocal ones among them see their chances for a permanent job in academia as close to zero. So much for academic freedoms in Germany.

21 Their occupational life-cycles are almost as nomadic as those of the exiled academics: most of them had lived at least in 2-3 different cities or countries during their career. In some cases, the fate of an entire group of research assistants depended on one professor: when he decided to transfer to another university, they were all terminated. This constant movement, what one of the comrades, Peter Ullrich, calls "precarious mobility", affected also their personal relationships in various ways. At the end of the day, regardless of where you are, as a precarious academic you are pretty much faced with all those aspects of precarity that are essentially hostile to decent human life. The crisis of subsistence is very much present for both the domestic precariat and the displaced scholars.

22 Considering the already huge extent of the domestic precariat, I think it's safe to say that, with the influx of displaced scholars from all over the world, Germany is literally becoming a huge disposal for the global surplus academic labor force. When talking about forced academic migration, we tend to focus only and excessively on the political risk aspect. We usually forget that the real immediate risk even for an emigrated scholar is not the political one anymore, but the precariousness of the employment status. Being completely dependent on short-term scholarships with no future prospect whatsoever, the displaced/emigrated scholars are not really "scholars at risk", but actually a part of the ever-growing reserve army of precarious academic labor force in Germany. For us, politically, the main question should not be the differences between

Germany and Turkey anymore, but the common denominator that urges us to organize and act collectively as precarious academics. This common denominator is the vulnerability of our situation and the devaluation of our labor on a global scale.

23 *In your book, you write about the disorienting experience of exile as a suspended state of existence in which there is no past or future but a continuous present. One of your interviewees describes it as a fog that limits your focus to the next step. Exilic life is exhausting. Moreover, the academic accomplishments of exiled scholars are erased, and they are asked to permanently define themselves not as scholars, but as scholars at risk. On the one hand, these scholars receive much needed scholarships at a very difficult time and they appreciate this. On the other hand, they are aware that they will never attain a status other than as temporary recipients of help in this system. Consequently, having been persecuted ceases to be something that happened to them and becomes a permanent identity that they cannot leave behind. What do you think that says about German academic and political culture?*

24 I think the problem goes beyond the German academic culture; it concerns more or less all Western host countries. The issue is manifold: It has a structural/economic aspect, a politico-cultural aspect, and an epistemological aspect. That is why it is unlikely to be solved in the near future. And that is why the academic establishment tries to make do with palliative and temporary solutions as long as it can.

25 Structurally speaking, the exiled academics are not likely to get a permanent position, because there are simply not enough permanent positions! The academic labor markets in the so-called "leading countries in scientific production", which are also the most frequently preferred host countries, are notoriously oversaturated. They can't even absorb their domestic qualified labor force. The percentage of non-tenured academic workforce in those contexts is astonishing. Germany leads with 93%, but it is not much better in other places either: In the USA, 75% of the academic workforce consists of adjuncts, in Denmark the percentage of precarious academics is estimated somewhere between 50% and 70%. In the UK, you read heartbreaking newspaper reports about adjuncts resorting to sex work to make ends meet, or sleeping in cars because they can't afford rent. By now, a vast quit-lit literature has developed in the US and Australia, documenting devastating stories of people quitting academia in frustration (American Association of University Professors 2014; Hirslund et al. 2018)[2]. And so on and so forth. Under these circumstances, it would be delusional to expect those labor markets to offer permanent jobs to outsiders, unless those outsiders prove to be excellent and provide indispensable research outcomes in their respective fields. Let's be honest: this is not the case for the majority of the exiled academics.

26 Politically speaking, most of the host institutions seem to be confused about whether they are hosting displaced scholars with a humanitarian or scientific motivation. On the one hand, there are some requirements: you are expected to provide degree certificates, bureaucratic documents (which are logistically hard to access for many under the circumstances of expulsion, escape, and exile), and a decent track record. You are required to design a more or less solid research proposal even when applying to risk scholarships. In some cases, you are invited to defend that proposal in front of a jury or to a referee who interrogates you on behalf of the scholarship-granting institution. Which is how it should be in the academic sector, under normal circumstances.

27 Most of the time, we see that humanitarian motivations outweigh concerns about academic merit in the selection procedures. This results in the allocation of risk-

scholarships to individuals who are objectively deemed unqualified or incapable of competing in the European academic labor markets, whereas those with strong CVs and international publications are left out with the argument that they can "take care of themselves anyway". And this makes one think that the selection procedure rather follows humanitarian concerns than academic criteria of merit. Another curiosity, especially in the German host institutions, is that once you get the grant, nobody in the host institution seems interested in what you're doing with the time and resources you're given. They seem even less interested in developing a real academic collaboration that might evolve into joint projects or alike in the future. Maybe this aspect in its acute form has a Germany-specific angle in the sense that the hosting of displaced academics is not seen as an investment in scientific collaboration, but rather as a liability one must endure for the sake of institutional prestige. Because I can say that this is not at all the case, for example, in Italy – at least not in my experience.

28 And last but not least, the tendency to keep the displaced scholars at the margins of academia stems from the inherent Eurocentrism of our epistemological structures. You can see the impact of this in the way your publications in your mother tongue, or your academic titles obtained in your country of origin, have little to no value at all in the host country. You can see it in the way you are constantly compelled to give interviews or do research on Turkey, regardless of your area of expertise – you may be an economic sociologist working on the mine industry in Congo, but here you are first and foremost a "Turkish" scholar, and rarely anything else. And even when you happen to do research on Turkey, you are usually expected to mouth generalities and endorse stereotypes – you know, that "Turkey was a secular country on its way to accomplishing what the entire Middle East strives toward, but suddenly, completely unexpectedly (!) the conservatives took over" kind of cliché.

29 All these structural, political and epistemological factors contrive a highly segregated academic environment, consisting of (1) a small group of privileged full professors and "principal investigators" as the main players, determining the scientific discourse and the institutional policies, (2) a huge mass of disposable academic workforce doing the less rewarding infrastructural work and basically sustaining the system, and now additionally (3) an ever-growing supply of desperate and grateful migrant academic labor force, used as image props and willing to do pretty much anything just to cling to the margins of academia in the host country.

30 *You discover something remarkable in these scholars' exilic uncertainty: a transformative potential. Can you elaborate on this? Do you think transformation of consciousness with regard to academic precarity and a desire to act is possible in the absence of such devastating and traumatic life events?*

31 I do see a potential for agency even under the most challenging structural conditions, especially when it comes to a group of people – academics in general – who are supposed to be endowed with a greater social and cultural capital than some other segments of the working population. But as I emphasized in the book, what I see and try to flesh out is a potentiality, and not an inevitability. Its realization depends on a variety of objective and subjective as well as random factors beyond prediction. Nevertheless, exile as experience is known to sharpen sensibilities toward diverse forms of grief and pain. This is at least the impression we get from the huge literature written on and/or by exiled intellectuals so far (Arendt [1943] 1996; Braidotti 1992; Doukhan 2012; Hamilton 2014; Harlem 2010 ; Lamming [1960] 1992; Rowley 1998; Said

2000).. This sensibility can manifest itself in a contemplative/individual way, or it can lead to a collectivity, if a concrete connection between different precarious lives can be established. The pervasiveness of structural vulnerability in today's world would theoretically permit such a connection. But whether this speculative link will materialize remains to be seen. But there are efforts in that direction, at least in the German context. The Network for Decent Work in Academia has already initiated a first attempt towards building a joint platform for the domestic precariat and the exiled researchers. So, there is hope.

32 As to whether there could be a transformation of consciousness in academia *in the absence* of extremely traumatic experiences: Of course, there could be and there *is* a transformation. We see it in the increasing number of scientific articles, newspaper columns, blogs and various social media platforms dedicated to the topic in the last years. But we can also see it in the frequency of virtual and physical campaigns and protests against academic precarity. In the meantime, there emerged solidarity networks in various countries, as in Germany, and unionization efforts as in the US or Denmark, for example. In contexts with higher unionization rates such as England and France, there have been a rise in union-led academic strikes as well. Precarious academics in those contexts are certainly not going through a collective trauma as, let's say, the Peace Academics from Turkey or our Syrian colleagues, but they are organizing nevertheless.

33 *Can you talk about the optimism of the will and your present efforts to organize against academic precarity? What do you think about the somewhat unique challenge of trying to transform academia from the inside by using its own archaic and hierarchical tools? Employers and funders are becoming increasingly transnational while the academic labor force is forced to become impossibly nomadic to the point where building and maintaining personal relationships has become both difficult and undesirable for young and even mid-career scholars. Can local and national organizing succeed without an international movement against these international forces? And how can an international movement be successful when we face diverse and complicated power structures in every country? What are the tools in our arsenal? In a way, we academics are our own oppressors. So who are our allies and who are we up against in this struggle? And most importantly, what do you think are we capable of?*

34 I think we need to think of resistance as a multilayered and long-term commitment to changing the status quo. And we need to be very clear about our goals, but be patient enough to work towards them gradually. If your aim is to transform the entire world-system, I'm afraid this will not happen in our lifetimes – at least not in the way we may envision it. The same applies to changing the academic production relations which inescapably follow the same logic as the entire structure. We cannot expect to change the whole mode of academic production within a couple of years – this is not only not feasible, but would also require forms of intervention which are likely to lead in a direction even more brutal and less egalitarian than the existing one. And, most of all, we have to be very disillusioned with regard to our own capacities. We know how hard it is to build collectivity and to convince people to act.

35 In this sense, local initiatives can be seen as a good starting point. They certainly can't fight against an entire web of power relations and capital accumulation mechanisms that dominate the sphere of academic production today. But they can achieve partial goals and affect institutional/regulatory change in the respective contexts they operate. Moreover, as we can see in the achievements of the Network for Decent Work

in Academia in Germany, academic anti-precarity initiatives, in whatever form they may emerge, ultimately manage to at least change the discourse: They lead the way in questioning the hitherto unquestioned and widely accepted academic work culture and institutional hierarchies. And more than everything, local initiatives and networks definitely inspire new venues and forms of resistance, and encourage more people to act.

36 *How did your biographical narrative inform your research on academic precarity in Turkey and in Europe? Many of us in the social sciences are trained to distance ourselves from our subjects of study. You reject that approach. What do you think about how the politics of scholarly objectivity and the dictate of maintaining distance to our research subjects affect our approach to our own problems as academics, both in terms of how we perceive these issues and how we act on them?*

37 I have based my entire methodology on a constant shift between biography and structure. I believe this – sociological imagination, to speak with Mills – to be the fundament of sociological analysis in the last instance. I don't think it is possible to understand and say anything of relevance about the world one lives in without first comprehending one's own coordinates. This does not imply a lack of analytical distance. Actually, quite the contrary: The ability to map out one's own socio-historical setting means being able to dissect even your own social reality and relationships. It entails a deliberate methodological choice to step in and out of your own daily trivia to detect the socio-historical within the subjective, and vice versa.

38 As to 'objectivity': If the concept of objectivity is used in the sense of 'transparency of methods' and 'verifiability of results' – sure, we should observe it by all means. But objectivity as an absolute stance in social sciences is a scam and we know it already. Even your choice of research question is a reflection of your conscientious standing. Sure, there are facts: For example, the tendency of the profit rates to fall is a structural dynamic and it is a fact. As a social scientist, you can either choose the side of those who want to circumvent this tendency, and do research on how to decrease the cost of the labor force, in order to keep the profit rates stable. Or you can choose the side of those who suffer under the profit drive of a few, and do research on how to change the system that subjugates human life to a futile cycle of profit rates. Both research directions depart from the same concrete fact. But what you want to learn from and do about that fact in your research is an ethical choice.

39 And this ethical choice has everything to do with your self-positioning within the system. I am not saying this in the narrow sense that "if you're coming from a worker background, you would choose your research agenda accordingly". We know that this is not as simple and one-dimensional as that. What I mean is rather this: What you do in your research is related to what kind of future you want to see created – maybe more than what kind of past you had. And your vision of the future is – or should be – inspired by your concrete experiences and observations. If you're not incorporating your own experience into your research, it means that one of them has lost all meaning for you: either your own social reality or your research.

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NOTES

1. Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF). Bundesbericht wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs (BuWiN) 2017. Statistische Daten und Forschungsbefunde zu Promovierenden und Promovierten in Deutschland. Available at: https://www.buwin.de/.
2. See also *The Chronicle of Higher Education* for a number of quit-lit essays and related commentaries: www.chronicle.com.

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